UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1998/1213
23 December 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 23 DECEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia regarding the armed incident that took place in the conflict zone of Abkhazia, Georgia, on 21 December 1998.

The Government of Georgia had warned the international community about the possible armed provocation of the Abkhaz side in the conflict zone (see S/1998/1193, annex).

We strongly believe that the Security Council will take undelayed and adequate measures in response to any attempt to stall the peace process in Abkhazia, Georgia.

May I ask your kind assistance in having the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Peter CHKHEIDZE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia issued in Tblisi on 22 December 1998

On 21 December 1998, at approximately 11 p.m., units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia deployed in the village of Orsantia, in the Zugdidi region, were subjected to intensive fire from machine-guns, grenade launchers, mortars and sub-machine guns coming from checkpoint No. 208 of the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

This unexpected and ungrounded onset lasted for 40 to 45 minutes; however, the Georgian side ignored the provocation and did not retaliate.

Armed groups of Abkhazians took advantage of the attack by penetrating the rear and opening fire on the Georgian units. As a result of this armed provocation, a 19-year-old serviceman, Roland Gabelia, was seriously wounded in the head and pronounced dead after he was brought to hospital.

The Government of Georgia has at its disposal incontrovertible evidence of the complicity of certain personnel of the CIS peacekeeping forces in this incident.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses its deep concern at this provocation and recalls the repeated warning of the Government of Georgia against the imminent escalation of tensions in the conflict zone, connected with the recent concentration of armed Abkhaz groups in the Gali region (S/1998/1193, annex).

In order to prevent such provocations and on the basis of the agreement reached in Geneva, on the proposal of the Georgian delegation, a meeting was held on 21 December 1998 in Gali between the power structures of the two sides, with the participation of the military leadership of the CIS peacekeeping forces. Although the parties had agreed to take additional measures to avert bloodshed, the above incident occurred practically as soon as the meeting was over.

It is clear that the above-mentioned action is just another attempt by the separatists to engage the Georgian side in large-scale armed confrontation.

The Government of Georgia has demanded that the military leadership of the CIS peacekeeping forces, with the participation of both sides in the conflict, conduct a thorough and comprehensive investigation into this incident and bring those responsible to justice. The Government of Georgia has also appealed to the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) to take all measures to expose the truth and to prevent violence in the conflict zone.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia expresses confidence that the international community will condemn this provocation and take adequate steps in order to prevent the obstruction of the peace process in Georgia.